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USES OF ADVERSITY.

USES OF ADVERSITY,

AND THE

PROVISIONS OF CONSOLATION.

BY

REV. HERMAN HOOKER,

AUTHOR OF

"THE PORTION OF THE SOUL," "POPULAR INFIDELITY," ETC.

"It is heaven upon earth to have a man's mind move in Charity, rest in Providence, and turn upon the poles of Truth."—*Bacon.*

"If we so contemplate as to learn what Christ was, and expects us to be, nothing will be wanting to carry us happily through the journey of life."—*Secker.*

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PREFACE.

In the little work, which I now presume to offer to the public, it has not been attempted to discuss at large the various topics which have come under review; aspiring more to supply materials for the reader's thoughts, than to save him the trouble of thinking. With such time as could be given to the subject, I have not been able to do what my sense of its merits demanded from me.

If, however, my thoughts, such as they are, shall impart light or consolation to any sorrowing heart, that will be an ample compensation for the time and sympathy, bestowed upon them. I can desire no higher satisfaction, and certainly there can be no truer honour, than to be the instrument of conveying comfort to the bereaved and desponding, and causing their grief to assume the aspect and direction of celestial love.

H. H.

April 28, 1846.

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USES OF ADVERSITY.

CHAPTER I.

THE SOUL'S NEED OF CONSOLATION.—ITS TRUE SOURCES.

If we are human we must desire rest, and if we are considerate we must discover our natural destitution of it. It is the good we seek in every thing, and yet every period and condition of life give signs that we are without it. We are not at rest in ourselves, nor can we be in our pursuits or successes. New accessions to our knowledge or fortune open new sources of care as well as of enjoyment. We may lose sight of ourselves in the search of great things, and gain a sort

of satisfaction which is nearer death than rest. A deadened conscience, an unreflecting mind are very common though very dangerous grounds of repose. This is, however, not a resting from care but a hardening in it, a sleeping at the freezing point that must end in death or in an anguished life. This is the best we can make of continued worldly successes, rested in, but how few attain even such a repose as this? Sorrows, disappointments, and losses distinguish the course of most through life. If they count up the number of their hopes and fond desires, they can scarcely find one that has been fully realized. One desire or one object of ambition has succeeded after another, but little has happened to them as they expected and endeavoured to have it.

Our crosses begin with our being, and as we move on, life seems but a combat with death. The forces of life have the ascend-

ency for a while, but having attained their maturity, they gently give place to the enemy, and sink down in weakness and decay. Dying then we ever are, or burying the dead; and to be at rest in ourselves, or in what the world has given or can give us, we must conceal our real state from our view; we must forget what we are, and what we need, what we have lost, and what we are losing. If we consider it, it will be found now that the objects or persons once dearest to us, once most depended on for happiness are gone, never to be recalled, and that those in whom our delights and hopes are centered now, will soon also be gone; that either they may not stay with us, or we may not stay with them, so that life is as one perpetual parting scene. Thus to measure out our days with hearts set round with warm affections and lively hopes, is indeed to "die daily," as to all just

grounds of merely natural repose. Nothing but a want of due reflection, or of due capacity to see things as they are, can conceal or disguise the infelicities of our best estate.

If we consider the men in whose hearts moral grief finds no place to rest; in whom the better qualities of our nature seem to be abolished, whom no lofty thoughts ever visit; who are too vain, too self-pleased to be repentant, we cannot feel that they are happy, however exempt they may be from pain and care. They want the greatness on which either sorrow or joy can fix itself. The broken in heart and down-cast of the earth seem more noble, more happy than they. Sorrow, as well as happiness, is the lot of profounder souls. It is a weightier thing than will lodge itself in their light minds. They procure pleasure at the price of not thinking at all on what concerns them most, and what must we think of their hap-

piness who dare not look themselves in the face, who are so well pleased with their abasement, their hollow enjoyments, that they can never rise to the height of desire for something better, never approach the manly virtue of being dissatisfied with themselves? What they call life is but a perpetual dying. Living consists in the fulfilling of our destiny. To be living is to be performing a work that lasts. But they accumulate nothing but the means of vain regrets, and the close of their course will show that they have been dying in advance of their time.

The evils and troubles of life come from our natural corruption. It follows us into the deepest recesses and accompanies us into the streets and crowds of cities; it is a living misery that cleaves to us. It is only as we experience deliverance from this that we find rest. The breaking up of life, the

blighting of its hopes, the visible strokes of Providence, are startling and certain events to all. They may be more appalling to the natural heart, but there is a process of "dying to the world," of "putting off the old man, with his affections and lusts," which for its difficulty and its pain is well styled the "crucifixion of the natural man." In this sense we must suffer and die, or be forever dying without finding death. What is natural to us, our worldliness, our "carnal mind" cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. Our wish that we might so enter, proves what trials we should experience, if we were really and spiritually preparing for such a rest. Our calling is "to be perfect," and while we are conscious of voluntary defects and sins; of doing less than we might to advance in holiness, if we are happy, it is from causes which entitle us not to be so. It is in shrinking from crosses,

in departing from the just fountains of repose that we thus find rest, and rest, so found, comes of the dying of the true elements of happiness within us.

Thus is it made apparent, that, try what we will, succeed as we may, we cannot find rest out of God. We were made in His image, made to enjoy Him. As our Creator, He alone can communicate the happiness which is suitable to His design in our creation. As creatures who have lost His image and His favour, we can be happy only in proportion as we regain them. That we might regain them, He has gone to an expense which forbids our supposing He will give us rest in any other way; an expense so great, that the good it procures must be the greatest He can confer —the great and only reality of good to be found.

God is now merciful; He deals with us

through the medium of His Son. If we will be reconciled to Him as He is to us through Christ, we shall have peace, and the blood of Christ shall cleanse us from all unrighteousness, but if not, God will have judgment without mercy; justice will hold the scales, and his condemnation will dry up all the sources of hope and good. This is a result of evil proportioned to the cost and preciousness of the good we decline, and both reason and conscience give forth this "looking for of judgment and fiery indignation." This is the handwriting of conscience upon the wall which we need no prophet to divine. Never shall we find peace till we come to God by Jesus Christ, come as straying children, despairing of help in ourselves. Then shall we find strength and consolation. Then shall the sorrows of life and the severities of a religious practice prepare the way for its blessings.

To unfold this truth, to brighten its evidence, to exhibit its beauty and its power as lived on by faith, to hold it up as streaming with consolation for the broken in heart, as giving strength to the weak, succour to the tempted, and victory to the contending, is my remaining design. This high end I can hope but poorly to accomplish; but should it be given me purely and singly to aim after it, that alone will be an ample reward of the service.

CHAPTER II.

CHRIST.—HIS INTERCESSION.—HIS SYMPATHY.—HIS CARE.

The causes of our sorrow being numerous and unavoidable, and our sorrows unprofitable and consuming unless sanctified by Divine grace, our first step towards the attainment of consolation is to come to God by repentance and faith in Christ, through whom alone we have access to Him, and the forgiveness of our sins. This done, we are children under discipline for heaven. Nothing can befall us, which shall not be overruled for our good. With our temptations there shall be succours and ways of escape. With our pains and griefs there shall be a killing of corruption within us,

and a springing up of life and joy under the renewing operation of the Spirit, given to witness and seal our adoption, to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us, and to be in us a living fountain of strength and consolation.

The blood of Christ, sprinkled upon our consciences and purifying them from dead works, takes the sting out of sorrow, and brings a "peace which the world can neither give nor take away." Its successes, its honours, its pleasures cannot impart it, nor can its humiliations, its losses, its disasters overthrow it. It is the "peace of God," given, "not as the world giveth," and no events, no creatures can take it from us. As there is peace in heaven, the peace that comes of purity, confidence, and love, so there is peace in us when our guilt is purged away, and confidence and love are springing up as the free breath of life upon the dead.

The question then of the reader's union with Christ I must consider settled. If he have doubts of his rights and privileges in Christ, it is only as faith and love clear them away, that he can be justly comforted. On this point he should not rest in doubt, and doubting, must lose the confidence and legitimacy of all true joy. What distils on the assured heart like the "oil of gladness," and breaks on the ear like news from heaven, or the sweet voice of the best beloved, strikes his soul with awe, and sounds as the complaint of one mourning the insecurity of his highest good.

The voice of God our Redeemer to the weary and heavy laden is, "come unto me and I will give you rest." As quickly as His word brought light out of darkness, can He bring joy out of our sorrow, strength out of our weakness, and hope out of our

despair. His sympathy, the owning of His love is a creature's health and gladness. If we be members of Him, there can be no perishing of our life, and no prevalent sorrow therein. We shall partake of His fulness, not more of grace and truth than of life and joy.

The riches of Christ, who can unfold them, who can sound their depths! He has redeemed us from the curse of the law, by fulfilling it for us; yea more, by giving himself for us, He has magnified it and made it honourable, so that God can be just in justifying us in Him. He did this too in our nature, stooping to our state and sympathies, and subjected to our infirmities and temptations, that He might be our merciful High-Priest in things pertaining to God. It was not alone that He might have power and merit to procure all things for us, but that He might be "God with us," in such a sense as

to bring Him near to us, and us to Him in sympathy. His humanity is our property in Him, a fellowship wherein we have boldness of access to God, and a pledge of His sympathy and acquaintance with our nature and wants.

O, what exaltation, what privileges of nearness and affection have we in Christ as *the first begotten of many brethren!* Having been tempted in all points, as we are, he is indeed our *merciful* intercessor with God. Having a feeling of our infirmity He is qualified to succour us, and passionately disposed towards us; and as being God, and having infinite merit in His condescension and work, He is ever prevailing with the Father.

What treasures of confidence and consolation then have we laid up in him! His work in our redemption from the day of His ascension until now, has not ceased to

plead in our behalf. His work in our sanctification pleads for us with a perpetual intercession. In our godly sorrows and trials, in our faith and love, in all our dying to the world and living unto God, there is a dwelling of Christ in us, which we may style his interceding and commending of us to his and our Father in heaven. When temptations assail us, when desolation comes in like a flood, He turns as with our sympathies to the mercy-seat, and claims our protection as a right of his own. Such is the indwelling and sympathy of Christ with us, that our griefs are in some sort His, and our inward life as the breathing and voice of his intercession for us; and if not a breath of his is unheard, what may we not expect from his full voice, which is the voice that spoke out a creation at first!

But we have His sympathy in our grief no more certainly than in our joy, and this gives a sweetness to the latter which excels

any thing that angels have ever tasted, as much as our debt of gratitude to Him exceeds theirs. This consideration gives a special value and dignity to our joys, and should greatly endear to our hearts the precept to "rejoice always." There is a joy in believing, a joy in the Spirit, a joy of sweet and trusting affection, which is quite compatible with all that is permitted to befall us, and which should ever be esteemed our duty and privilege in Christ Jesus. Our holy joys also, as well as our griefs are parts of His pleading for us, as both are the fruits of His grace, and represent Him in us. And if the angels of God could sing for joy at his birth, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good will towards men*, how much more should we rejoice and sing when He is born in our hearts, and our rejoicing is His, and the giving of glory to Him?

Unsearchable, indeed, are the riches of

Christ. He was the Son of man, that He might die in our offending nature, and He was the Son of God that His death might have merit to save us. He was God and man in one person, that we might be one in Him, *members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones*, so that *we live, yet not we, but Christ liveth in us.*

When weak and tempted, when bowed down in anguish, it is not alone that we suffer; *we suffer with Him;* ours is *a fellowship of his sufferings*, and we know that *He* ever liveth to make intercession for us. Yea, He loves and knows us so, that we cannot have a joy or a sorrow which He does not make his own, cannot receive a gift, or even so much as a cup of water, which He will not esteem and reward as given to Himself.

He would have us know, too, His relationship to us, how near and dear it is, and

sends us messages daily by his Spirit, as He did by his first disciples; *Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.* This, too, is the proof of our title to kindred with Him, which He delivered to us, *Whosoever doeth the will of my Father, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*

Now I would have every sorrowing person consider "this one thing," *the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.* If you are a true believer, you are in the dearest of all relations to Him, and sharing in his fullest sympathy. At this moment He is feeling, yea, pleading for you. As He gave Himself for you, even to the death of the cross; so now He prays the Father, by his cross and passion, by his death and sacrifice, that your faith may be strengthened, your services accepted, and your sufferings

made to work for your good. Your name is engraven on his heart; you are never out of his mind; you are given to Him in an everlasting covenant, and what He asks for you must and will be done. To you it is a favour; to Him it is a right purchased with his blood. He claims it for you by all the worth there is treasured up in Him, and by all the sanctity of the law He has fulfilled for you. He presents you to God redeemed and justified in Himself, yea, He presents your performances, sorrows, and desires, perfumed with the incense of His merit, so that they and you are faultless before the Father, who feels not more bound by His covenant than disposed by his own love freely *to give you all things* with Christ.

It was the prayer of Christ, "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may

behold my glory which Thou hast given me." This expresses His desire for His people, and the same is carried forward in His priestly intercession. It includes every thing which is fitting to prepare them for such a holy and glorious vision; and if we can but believe, but realize our interest in His pleading, we must feel *it is well with us*, no matter what befalls us. We are one with Christ in God. By virtue of His intercession we have a communion of comfort and grace, and are assured, that all events will be dispensed for our profit. It is not more *given us to believe on His name*, than it is *to suffer for His sake*, that is, our sufferings are the gifts, the privileges of His calling, the methods by which that calling is made sure, and we fitted for rest in Him, as by a dying unto the world and a living unto Him. As He was *perfected through suffering*, so are we; it is the end,

the sweetening result of all He gives us to bear.

There is *strong consolation* in every view we can take of this subject. Christ is set down at the right hand of God, there to receive gifts for men. All power and judgment are committed to Him, and He can dispense his love and his grace as He will. He said, before his parting, "If I go away *I will send the Comforter.*" His bodily presence is withdrawn, but Christ in his Spirit is with us still: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." He is with us, and what is more, He is in us *the hope of glory*. What a comfort is it to know that He ever liveth to dispense a gift like this; that through sanctification of the Spirit and the sprinkling of his blood, He is ever presenting us before his Father, not merely as needing his love, but as entitled to it for his own sake? No wonder the Spirit is

given to seal us unto the day of redemption, of full entrance into his joy, and to make intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. They are as the effects of Christ's interceding for us, as the echos of his voice, and it is thus we have communion with the Father of our spirits, and derive from Him life, health, and spiritual enlargement.

And if we consider that Christ was appointed to be a Priest unto God for us, that having died for us, He might present his death and passion; yea, Himself even by way of intercession in our behalf; that God is well pleased in Him, and heareth Him always, yea, loves us too with the love wherewith He loveth his own Son,—a love which giving Him for us, can give no greater, and will withhold no lesser good,—may we not come boldly to a throne of grace, not doubting that we shall receive

whatsoever we ask in his Son's name, and through the interceding of his Spirit. To have such a resort as this in perplexity, in weakness, and in trouble, is surely to have the mastery of them; it is the opening of the wells of salvation that we may quench our every thirst, and feel, as we taste, the springing up of life in God. What is all other life to this? what is our greatest shining in the eyes of men, compared with the lustre we can take on here, which, though it may not dazzle, is yet the Spirit's brightness, which is the light of heaven? Is it true that we ever sink under sorrow, and a thick gloom broods on our soul, when we know that we have such an advocate, such a sympathizer as Christ? Is it true that our hearts so set themselves on creatures, that losing them, their aid, or their sympathy, we wither and bend as if we had no springing up of our affections to better

things, when the good, the love we have of all creatures, is but a hint of the greater good and love we have in Him, and the withdrawing of theirs is but the unfolding and assuring of His to us? Can friends, can creatures love like God? Their love is more worthy of our esteem than any thing else they can give, but it cannot make us worthy of itself, and not seldom harms us by making us love ourselves, which is the dwarfing of the inner man; but God's love enlarges the heart, as a continual going forth to Him, and returning of comfort and worth from Him. It makes beautiful its object, and treasures its own excellence therein. Its strength too, it is not a blind strength; it is not a force that breaks on us, and then is withdrawn; it is an everlasting love, tiring not with serving, revolted not by our unworthiness, chilled not by our poor returns. The love of creatures may

be exhausted; it looks for returns, and is impatient, they tarry so long and come so empty; our coldness is apt to embitter or destroy it; it seeks us not as humble to exalt us, but rather seeks us that we are exalted; esteems us not that we are worthy to be esteemed, and flies from us when it sees us trembling and doubting to aspire to it. Divine love takes its motive from our low estate, finds us out in our obscurity, smiles most on us when our unworthiness dares not look up to behold it, and delights to cheer our poverty with its richest ministering.

Let us then *set our affections on things above*, and give to Christ our loves, hopes, and joys. He has given us his, and He will accept ours, and treasure them up against the day of his appearing. Our affections are precious gifts in his sight, and they should be in ours. They should be

set too on precious objects, and nothing that perishes with the using, nothing that dies or can die, is so precious but that we should quickly part with it for Him. He is the great thing, and having Him, we shall have the best good of all others. Our adversities and disappointments shall be our friends and helpers. The things that we account loss and dross, shall be turned to gold. Nor shall we be without sympathy in the process. *In all our afflictions He is afflicted.* Having had experience in our outward and inward sufferings, He knows and compassionates our case. The sweetness and worth of all these our passions and sensibilities are in him as God-man, and therefore He is touched with a feeling of our infirmities, and is moved to intercede for us, with a perpetual memory of what we are and what we need.

The first action of our sorrow should then

bring to mind his intercession, and our first relief should be sought in applying to Him; in *casting all our cares upon Him, knowing that he careth for us.* The sympathy of friends may be sweet, but it cannot turn our troubles to blessings. His sympathy not only soothes, but improves and enriches its object. When affliction comes and all creature-help fails us, we are ready to invite the prayers of the faithful, we put our confidence in those alone who have power with God, but in Him we have an advocate who can never mistake our necessities or be ignorant of them, who is as well disposed to us as we are to be relieved, and who prevails always and obtains the blessing He asks. If we can but obtain his ear, but move his sympathy, that meed, He is so ready to give, and we so urgent to receive, no temptation shall overcome us, no disaster shall cast us down; His first notice shall be as his voice, PEACE, BE STILL, and there shall

be a calm, a healing sweetness in the soul, such as none can know who have not been rescued from danger, or relieved in distress by His hand.

The trials which He gives and delivers us from when their design is accomplished, impart a taste of good, an insight of happiness so superior, that the soul feels there is no enjoyment out of Him, and acquires such a distaste for the pleasures and stores it would have rested in, that they become as poverty and grief to it under the hiding of this better good; yea, if this be but slightly veiled, something like a thick gloom seems to settle on the world. It is to give us this sense of his preciousness, that He checks and foils us in our search and love of other things. Who ever tasted His graciousness, working a sweet acquiescence in His will, without pressing after a fuller fruition of it? Without feeling the insufficiency of every thing else to take its place? The best virtues and

sensibilities of creatures which so engage our hearts and make their loss so great a grief to us, are but a faint shading and sprinkling of Himself, intended to exalt our faith above them, to assist us as light does, to behold with our eyes its source, and feel the cheering of its all-surrounding presence. Yes, these affections so pleasant to give and receive, and these graces of ours so justly to be prized, are as tapers which God keeps burning for us to see Him by, as wings He gives to assist our rising to Him, and if it be in these we rest, no wonder he should impair or extinguish them, since the perfection of them is in Him, and He only can make the returns we need.

"Truth of subliming import! with the which
Who feeds and saturates his constant soul,
He from his small particular orbit flies
With blest outstarting! From *himself* he flies,
Stands in the sun, and with no partial gaze
Views all creation, and he loves it all,
And blesses it, and calls it very good!"

CHAPTER III.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.—CHRIST'S PROVIDENTIAL CARE.—GODLY MOURNING.—ITS DESIGN AND COMFORTS.—SUFFERING ENDING IN JOY.

SEEING God as we may see Him and as He would be seen in all his works and creatures, they will be as our evening lights, very useful when the sun is absent, but if he be risen we can do without them. That we may thus trace Him and find Him out, He gives us pledges of sympathy and care, feels and prays with us and for us, and sets his marks and stars on us, so that our walk of faith is assisted as it were by sight and sense. If He send a great affliction it is his voice which we heard not in its whisperings; it is a workman come into our service

as with the sound of hammers. And how well is it when we are made to hear, when every grace is roused to action, and the soul in review finds and is ready to say, "Before I was afflicted I went astray."

If the desire of our eyes is taken away, if pain or sickness is sent, we are then the most fit and inviting objects of Divine compassion. The solaces of the Divine Comforter are given then if ever, as they are never more largely dispensed than when most needed. It is thus that God makes himself "All in all" to the soul. It was not till John was in bonds, a prisoner in Patmos, that his vision was illumined, and he saw heaven opened, and heard the new song.

It was the prayer of our Divine Intercessor, not that we should be taken out of the world, but that we might be kept from the evil that is in it, and this prayer is his now, and is answered in all the pains of our dying

to the world, in all the strokes that sever our affection from creatures, and in all the light that comes into the mind out of darkness.

It is very common for persons to form connexions and to place themselves in situations without considering the influence they may have upon character. They thus expose themselves to the evil that is in the world. But as the disposition which rashly ventures on danger, and encounters temptation is evil and unfilial, it can ordinarily be corrected only by bitter experience. Lot chose the plain of Jordan, though he knew he should expose himself to the "conversation of wicked men," and how was he preserved from this evil? He was soon carried into captivity, and when after his recovery he settled in the cities of the plain, he was stripped of all his property, and was at last compelled to escape for his life, to be snatch-

ed away as a brand from the burning. When our plans of happiness fail and our goods are spoiled, we may take comfort if it be in answer to the intercession of Christ, and intended to keep us from the evil of resting in creatures. We may be sure too, if we belong to Him, yet set our affections on things below, or rush into temptation and put our virtue in peril, He will be heard, and if our frowardness be not checked, when we have strayed but a little, a heavier blow will be required and will surely fall on us.

David too, we see not how he could have escaped "the corruption that is in the world," if he had been permitted to prosper in his ways. Blow after blow fell upon him, heavier and heavier, till he embraced the hand that smote him as his life, and died to flesh and sense. His very griefs seemed to have been gifted as with voices to utter praise. The very bitterness of his woes was as the rising up and passing off of the dregs of his

nature, leaving all below as the pure sweetness of heaven.

But while it is certain that Christ's intercession and care for his people must ensure their deliverance from evil, it is not certain what methods he may employ, nor are we, who can see only the outward man, to infer that His afflictive dispensations prove the guilt or unfaithfulness of those on whom they fall, no more than his bounties attest the merit of those who receive them. He is a sovereign in all his dispensations, and what we may know is, that what he does is best. The secret cherishings of the heart are known to Him, and there is doubtless a measure of adaptation to them and to our growth in grace in all his pleadings and dispensations. In our own case we may often see, and should study the reason and end of what He dispenses, but in the case of others we cannot know, and should not be curious to inquire. Job was a righteous man not

needing chastisement as we can see, yet never was one afflicted as he was, or so crowned and honoured at last. One thing then we may and must infer from what we see happening in the world, that temporal advantages and blessings are no infallible token of the Divine favour, and that their value and importance are not estimated by our rules of judging; in short, that God so lightly esteems them, that he gives and withholds them in such a way as leaves none, not even his dearest children, to determine his favour from them. The *better part*, which they have chosen, is so far better, that the withholding or bestowing of these things, seems not to be taken into the account of his regard.

The most devoted Christians are sometimes distinguished by the severity and number of their trials. Nothing seems to prosper that they take in hand. They are "troubled on every side;" their plans of worldly advance-

ment come to naught; their children do not go in the way of their training; the wicked rise up against them, and they seem to live as saints *wearing out*. To them it is especially given not only to believe in Christ, but to suffer on his behalf, and although this discipline cannot be seen to be needed in their case more than in that of others, it no doubt magnifies the grace of God in them, and will one day be so cleared up, as to be the ground of their wonder and praise. This important lesson it certainly teaches, that it is the end of our salvation, and not our brief comforts by the way, on which the eye of Divine love is fixed. It is very conceivable also that the thoughts of our low condition in the world, of the painful course we run here, will greatly sweeten the repose of heaven. If we see that God has been glorified, that through our poverty and sorrow rightly borne, he has given lessons of faith and

patience to others, how light will these afflictions then appear, and how exceeding and eternal the weight of glory they bring to us? We know but little, and but little can know, but God is infinitely wise and good, and must order all things for the final good of the redeemed. We make too much of our life, of its conditions and advantages, and it is this which chiefly perplexes us in judging of the ways of God. What we enjoy and what we lose is over prized, and this makes it difficult to see the wisdom of His dealings. It turns our thoughts on ourselves, on the means of improving our condition, and sets us designing and acting for this life, as though we had lost all suspicion of a better; as though we had never known and could not learn that the impoverishing and embittering of this, may be turned to the enriching and sweetening of that; as though we would prefer the

shadows and hints of any good if we might rest in them, to the brightness and completion of every other, if they be to be waited for; as though grown up and just ready to enter upon our inheritance, we had betaken ourselves again to childhood, and our little crosses were as the bursting of our hearts, and our minutes were as years of waiting for the promised blessing. O, if we could look at our worldly state through the eyes of faith, if we would consider our life, how short it is, a vapour which the sun no sooner rises on than it is exhaled, a breath of our being as contrasted with its duration, we should be struck with the littleness of what we lose or gain, and the tide of grief would be stayed. Our wonder would be not that we suffer so much, but that we have any thing to enjoy; not that we fail to acquire great things, but that we are thought of at all; and thus weighing things in the balances

of the sanctuary, thus coming to ourselves, we should remember we have a home to go to, and a welcome inheritance there. We should be ready to exclaim,

"'Tis the sublime of man,
Our noontide majesty, to know ourselves
Parts and proportions of one wond'rous whole."

Ceasing to wonder that our thousand desires are not gratified, that we are not singled out and set above the many, our little comforts would swell into treasures, the little spot of land we hedge around, would be as a father's garden, bearing the richest fruits and scented with the fragrance of the sweetest flowers, and we should feel as invited out by his voice to inherit all things. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Their love shall be as the gathering of its best fruits, yea, the feeding of others upon them shall be as

their own sweet partaking to the full, and at the harvesting, their garners shall be filled; "good measure, pressed down, and running over, shall God give into their bosoms."

"Blessed, too, are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Not that there is any thing in sorrow that can entitle to blessing. No; imagine not that because you are poor, unfortunate, afflicted, or despised, you are thereby commended to the favour of God. Present sufferings have no value except as they are improved; they belong to "the sorrow of the world, which worketh death." But there is a sorrowing, a mourning which is attended with blessing, and this you should consider, not that you may be relieved from it, but that you may find your title to be comforted in it. It is a "sorrow for sin after a godly sort." This is a comprehensive sorrow, and its sources

and objects are on every side. It is not repentance, but a means of producing it; it "worketh repentance unto life." This shows the kind of blessing with which it is connected, and the grounds of it. Sin is the procuring cause of all we suffer, and we can have no mourning that should not bring it before the mind as the evil and bitter thing.

He, whose mourning takes this turn, and comes to this result, will attain a deepening abhorrence of sin, and this again will quicken the "sorrow that worketh repentance." Thus will he learn to love much, because he will see more and more that much is forgiven. He will look on Him whom his sins have pierced, and "mourn apart with a great mourning," as though he could never forgive himself, though he may be forgiven. This sentiment rises up from a fountain of blessed-

ness already opened within him. It makes his a mourning yet blessed life. He chooses to mourn, yea, if he could not mourn, he would lose all relish of his enjoyments. His mourning is the spring of his love and gratitude, and the best happiness he knows or desires to know, is to be grateful for his redemption and to love his Redeemer, and because he is no more grateful, and no more loves, he feels it is blessed to mourn. There is a dignified acquiescence, a courageous bearing in his suffering, as if it were more the privilege of his unworthiness, which he might use to its subduing, than a thing to be complained of, or hastily relieved.

But the true occasions for mourning on account of sin, are not found in ourselves only; they abound on every side. The world is lying in wickedness, and he who has fled for refuge to the hope set before him, cannot be indifferent to the condition of others. Wretched men desiring not the

knowledge of the Lord, crimes and offences, like the blood of Abel, crying aloud from the ground, the general neglect of the Gospel, the prevalence of unbelief, the worldliness and inconsistent lives of those who call themselves Christians,—these and the like are sources of blessed mourning. The Psalmist says, "Rivers of tears flow down my cheeks, because men keep not thy law." So every good man mourns, and is blessed in his mourning.

It is manifest that mourning for such causes must make the soul happier, as it tends to repentance and better living; "not unto ourselves, but unto Him who hath given Himself for us." And if we will rightly consider it, it will be seen that we can have no affliction which may not come under the class of blessed sorrows; so that if we mourn "after a godly sort," we may feel that ours is the benediction of Christ,

and that we have His sympathy, His intercession to secure the blessing. Besides that there is a tendency in this mourning to invite His regard, there is a working in it of repentance, to which He has promised everlasting life. This then is the mourning and heaviness which we may not desire to shun. It is our fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. They were all on account of sin, sin tasted for us, our sin punished in Him; and our grief is our sin tasted, and sin abroad vexing the soul and taxing the sympathy, as an offence to Him and the destruction of our fellow men. What consideration can be more worthy to enlist our patience, what view of the trials of life can be more consoling? Let us not lose the advantage of it through any conceit that it does not apply to ourselves. Is not God's favour life, and his loving kindness better than life, and if we mourn "after a godly sort" we have

both, and what can we have that is not a cheap exchange for these, or having these, what can we want? We must feel this, for He declares it, and gives his people to know it. What is more, He makes them know it through suffering. Where sin abounds grace does much more abound in overcoming it, and where grief abounds on account of it, there joy does much more abound and overflow. Strange as it may seem, godly sorrows are the roots and sproutings within us of the truest joy. We must believe this or doubt that it is possible for God to make us happy. All the blessings and promises of the Gospel import our distress. They are offered and made to operate as our healing and consolation.

When we consider the work and offices of Christ as a Saviour, his care, his sympathy, his benedictions, his promises, we

discover that "He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister"—a remedy for our state, which implies our destitution of happiness and our sinking into deeper woes. His service is only welcome when we feel our state. Our grief is produced in order to our joy. There is no sorrow of the Christian but seems to point to and lead on to joy. His trials for the present are connected with the glory of the future. He reaches happiness through tears, but they are not tears of misery, because he is consoled in them. He is enabled to overcome sorrow with joy. His sufferings humble him and make him grateful for the goodness which relieves them. His selfishness is reduced with his complaining. He is happy. His penitence, his humility, his weakness, his poverty of spirit, are all elements of the truest happiness and the certain fruits of godly sorrow.

If our sufferings could have the effect to raise us to an elevation where we should have no pride of life nor fear of man; where the world should lose its charms, and eternity be ever near, we should not feel the need of consolation. It is the tendency of all godly sorrow to produce this effect. We should not have this sorrow if we had not sin, and did not love the world too much. But we are so prone to stray from duty, we love so languidly, we have so much that must die within us before we can fully live, that for us to improve is to be tried; to be ever dying into life. Even the knowing of ourselves, as we are, must fill us with penitential sorrow, and make it blessed to mourn.

Now if we consider it is the end of the Divine dealings with us that we may know ourselves and our errors, and find our only help and remedy, there is ground in them

for our continual rejoicing. Our tribulation truly leads to patience, our patience to experience, and our experience to hope—the progressive steps of joy. If we loved God as he is worthy to be loved, that joy would be unspeakable and full of glory.

Let me not be supposed to be unmindful of our infirmities and sins, as preventing our attaining the comfort provided for the Christian. Let me not conceal either that the grace which refines and heightens his sense of joy, also develops and sharpens his sensibility to sorrow. Like other men he has natural affections and tastes; he has hopes and objects of life which are dear to him, and in which he may be wounded and cast down. Causes exist around him and in him, any one of which may plunge him into the deepest distress. Sickness, or a pain of his body may affect his soul, and throw a sadness over every aspect of life.

It is the privilege of his sanctity not to feel the desolation of his affections less than others, but to be provided with support and consolation under them. To show whence these are derived, to sow light in his path, not that he may feel or grieve less in a godly way, but be more consoled therein, is the only just office of Christian sympathy.

Nothing is so well adapted to effect this as a consideration of the work and offices of Christ. We are guilty, and He has atoned for our guilt; we are without righteousness, and He offers us his own spotless and perfect as it is; we are weak, and it is in weakness his strength is perfected; we are in bondage to the fear of death, and by dying for us He has drawn the sting of death, and spoiled him who had the power of it. With hearts then assured of an interest in Him, and in his intercession, what trouble or what change can be too great for

us to go through, leaning on the arm of our beloved? To whom can we go in our distress but unto Him? He has all power, and his compassion moves towards us, unmerited and unasked. Our guilt if it be owned, our bereavements and our low estate if they be rightly borne, commend us to his regard. The raven's cry, the slightest distress of sentient being, escapes not his notice, and surely the souls He has redeemed and made to understand and return his love, can never be burdened without his sympathy; their cries can never go up to Him in vain. To them his ear is ever open; for them He ever pleads; and they shall never seek his face in vain. How strong is the encouragement we have to be "ever looking unto Him" out of our afflictions? Can we ever forget Him, and what He has borne for us? Can we ever cease to love Him who hath so loved us? Can

our sorrows ever fail to turn us to Him in prayer, since they turn Him to us in compassion? The prayer of the contrite heart will ever bring down from Him all needed support. When we pray in the Spirit of Christ, interceding for us, and his worth presents and hallows the prayer, how shall we not be heard, not feel his sympathy moving on our affections, and transforming us into something of his image and blessedness?

CHAPTER IV.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE.—MEANS OF FINDING ITS DIRECTION.—BENEFITS OF OBSERVING IT.—MODES AND COMFORTS OF RELYING UPON IT.

THE intercession of Christ may naturally lead us to consider his providential government over us. As in the one he is ever our memorial before God, so in the other does he observe and order all events that may affect us. There is rich comfort and instruction in this truth. It is a truth of the greatest practical moment, and yet it is to be feared, it is not generally so esteemed.

When we survey the immensity of space, and by artificial aids to our sight the sparkles of unnumbered worlds emerge into view, too remote from us for any computa-

tion of science, and consider it is but a mere glimpse which we have of the suburbs and outposts of creation, we are forced to believe that God must be in the midst to uphold and regulate the whole; but we are very apt to be unmindful of his hand in the little events of life. How the Hand which holds all worlds, should give to every bird its instinct and plumage, every flower its colour and fragrance, and every particle of matter its place and office; how the same Mind that orders the motions of planets, and controls the destinies of empires, does yet as certainly number all the hairs of our heads, and note all the thoughts of our hearts, and the motives and courses of them, is something which we may admire, yea, must believe as fully revealed to us, and yet how rarely does it affect and console us as a reality.

Great events, astounding disasters, im-

press us with the truth of a Divine Providence, but a providence in all things, in the smallest as truly as in the greatest occurrences, is the doctrine fitted to be the soul's rest. God works not alone in our great affairs, but whatsoever happens to us proceeds from his appointment. It is by looking at His hand in the common events of life, that we acquire the habit of depending upon Him, and of feeling that He is indeed always at our side. If we carry this doctrine into life, rest on its truth, and look for its evidence in the little troubles and difficulties, the little benefits and enjoyments of each day, we shall become convinced that God is ever busied with our guidance, and we shall find a comfort in this conviction that will be more than a match for the fruits of every other dependence. We shall learn to feel that he is ever about our path, and about our

bed, watching our every step and noting our every want, as one who has the full charge and care of us. As God speaks not to us with his voice, this is the only way we can attend to Him, silently working for us—the only way we can learn His will, carefully minding his working. If then we would have his guidance, which is always our safety and comfort, we must be ever tracing His hand in the minutest events, for as it is in every thing He works, we shal lose the line of his direction without a continual observance, and losing that, we must go wrong and oblige Him in some sort to enforce our attention by dispensing to us afflictive or startling events. If we will not see Him in little things, in the stirring, as it were, of leaves; if we catch not the glances of his eye and gather not thence his directions to us, and He be pledged or willed to move us to any good,

He will lay on us a heavier hand, will correct us with his rod till we know it is He and not another who is dealing with us. We are told that when we depart from his counsel He will correct us; His love, his care, his charging Himself with our keeping, obliges Him to do it, and if we will not eye Him in his providence and take his gentlest directions, the softest intimations of his will, what can we expect but that He will come out and speak as one having authority.

A dutiful child sees in the little glances and changes of a parent's eye the clear expression of his will, and well pleases him indeed, when following such guidance he needs no words of authority to secure his attention; yea, the loving child will watch his countenance and discern therein his wishes before they are expressed, as eager to save him the trouble of speaking, and

should we take the guidance of the eye of God and seek to discern in the littlest events the indications of His nearness to us, the beckoning of His hand, the expressions of his countenance towards us, we shall well please Him; we shall show the reverence to which He is so justly entitled from us, and save ourselves, it may be, from those severe corrections which are as the clear accents of his voice.

We cannot tell how many of our plans fail, or how many succeed for want of his direction; we only know his guidance is ever safe and best. We see often our good comes out of our disappointment, and that our ruin lay in the way of our choice. We are tried, our affections are wounded, the bright hopes of our youth reach not their objects, our kindling aspirations after improvement brings us not the needed good, and the review of life shows us that

little has happened to us according to our designs from time to time. We have not wisdom to discern the dangers that lay in our path, or to appreciate why we prospered in this and failed in that, but we see if we had succeeded in some things it would have been our misfortune. We see the weak and ignorant sometimes outstrip the strong and wise in their designs; we see preferences and successes and results every where which baffle all the rules of human calculation and show "there is a Providence which shapes our ends."

The events of Providence which we call mysterious are only so as differing from what we in our ignorance would do or expect. The good and useful are cut down, while the evil and unprofitable are spared. The single, the apparently injurious, who care for none and for whom no one cares, live on to old age, while

the son who is as the staff in the hands of his parents is suddenly taken away; the husband of the wife who looks to him as her protector and guide, and finds in him the prompter of her virtues, and in his love the sweetening of her duties, is removed as at noonday: or the widow whose heart is garnered up in her only son, just as she begins to lean upon him, is compelled to see him carried out to the grave.

We are troubled in heart at things like these, but why should we be troubled while we so imperfectly comprehend them. God thus confounds our wisdom and shows what light esteem He has of our momentary interests here. Our lives are as minutes, and our great affairs as trifles, compared with the duration and value of what He has in store. When we can see, as He does, the end from the beginning, and tell all the relations between time and eternity,

this evil will turn to good, this darkness to light, and this confusion to order. At best, we see not but we must be unsettled in mind, and filled with dismay by events which are perpetually occurring about us, if we are not stayed and comforted by considering them as the wise and just ordering of his hand.

If we are humble in our ignorance, and confiding in our devotion, if we submit ourselves to his discipline as not knowing what is best, and as not wishing to choose for ourselves; as satisfied that He who has all power and knows all things will order all wisely, He will give us proofs of the wisdom of our trust; *the secret of the Lord* will become ours: we shall feel He

> "Sees all as if that all were one;
> Loves one as if that one were all;"

and it will not be more our blessedness than our conviction that

"God nothing does nor suffers to be done,
But we would do ourselves if we could see
The end of all he does as well as he."

It is manifest that such a view of Divine Providence must yield great support and consolation under affliction. It is alike our privilege and duty to cherish it, to rest in it as in *the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.* The sanctifying influence of such a view upon our hearts, if it be habitual, will be very great. It sets God constantly before the mind, and teaches us to merge our pleasures in his will. It checks our proneness to walk in the sight of our own eyes, abases our self-confidence, and prepares us to be profitably blessed. I know nothing better adapted to break the force of our wills, to subdue the worldliness which we so naturally acquire from the world, than the habit of eyeing and owning God in his own Provi-

dence. I see not how we are to be preserved from the chilling influence of the world, unless we regard it as the theatre of Divine operations, and all events as revealing to us the hand of God. Not to view it thus is practical atheism, a living without God as to all use of his guidance and all sense of dependence upon Him. When you see a person of tender and sacred regard to a Providence, watching its manifestations, and delighting to follow its leadings, you see a happy christian whose path is illumined and shineth more and more. This is the way to keep God in mind, to depend on Him, and to find his direction, for in this respect *he will be sought after.*

Our adversities and miscarriages spring not from the ground, and it is for want of seeing his majesty and wisdom in them that they fret and chafe us so. Because we

look at them more as caused by ourselves or others, and see God less in them, we are more ready to complain of them. If we saw other agents less and God more in his dispensations, we should not so often lose the lessons they are designed to teach. A mindfulness of God in his providence would also check our presumption and preserve us from many rash undertakings which end in disaster. Nothing that He chooses not for us can in any just sense be regarded as good; and if we will not seek his direction, will not notice or take it when given, even our successes may be any thing than blessings.

But it is not a blind, an unthinking or unacting dependence which is required of us. "To make," says Dr. South, "our reliance upon Providence both pious and rational, we should in every great enterprise we take in hand, prepare all things

with that care, diligence, and activity as if there were no such thing as Providence for us to depend on; and again when we have done all this, we should as wholly and humbly depend upon it, as if we had made no preparations at all. And this is a rule of practice which will never fail or shame any who shall venture their all upon it." Such a practice makes us in a sort co-workers with God in executing all the plans of life, and is not this the best pledge of their safety and success? If our plans thus fail it is not as some count failing; it is succeeding by what seems our failing. That which we enter upon with due effort and due trust in God; that which we ardently desire in subordination to his will and gain not, is withheld as likely to harm us, or for the purpose of effecting for us some greater good in its place. And though it may be difficult for us to conform to it

as a rule of life, yet are we bound to infer it from the promises and goodness of God. It is not always that we can see our disappointments to be best for us, and if we could, there would not be a sufficient trial of our faith, but we can see it, if we give heed, in so many instances, as greatly to encourage our faith it must be so in all.

Alas, that we should be so prone to distrust the care and provisions of Providence! We indulge fears for our health, for the continuance of our life, for the supply of our wants; we are anxious and perplexed for the success of our plans, and the event of our business, much as if we could depend only on ourselves. And yet if we will carefully review life we shall find that in most cases where our fears were greatest, we experienced less difficulty and disaster than we expected. We shall find that our troubles have come greatly short of our

fears, and that in passing through the severest trials unlooked for support has been given us. So common is the feeling of distrust on this subject that I think this must be the experience of all. Most of the trials of life seem great and difficult to be borne in prospect; their approach disconcerts and alarms us as if we stood alone without strength or provision to pass through them. This shows that we are living greatly below our privilege and duty. It shows that a great fault, a great misery of our condition is a want of trust in Providence.

The ways in which we are provided for are numberless, and for the most part unseen by us. God sometimes disposes the hearts of others to encourage and relieve us, or He directs our efforts, and brings aid from quarters which promised little, or He strengthens our heart to bear and profit

by the crosses and events He dispenses to us.

If we will but eye Providence in our own case, and look to it for support, we shall not only feel its stay, but have occasion for admiration and praise at what is wrought for us. Our disappointments as well as our successes will be just subjects of grateful recollection; and perhaps the former rather than the latter will call for our highest praise. We shall certainly see cause for unceasing gratitude that we have not always succeeded in our desires, and gain perhaps the true felicity of feeling that we are not so wise that we can safely appoint any thing for ourselves. Our blessedness is not to choose, but to know that God chooses all things for us.

"It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Every agent in society, every element in nature, and even the angels of

God are charged with some office affecting us. The connexions we form, our prosperity and adversity, and every circumstance relating to our condition are of the Divine choosing. It must be so, and if it were not, we could never be conducted safely through such a world as this. None but God, having control of every influence affecting us, and adapting every thing with foresight of what we are and what we need, could secure our spiritual advancement, and bring us at last to glory. How suitable then that we should commit to Him the choosing of all things for us, and if we can feel that we have done so, how sweet will be the consciousness that the sorrows of our condition are parts of the discipline which his wisdom assigns us. They may be difficult to bear; we may not see the end or direction of them now, but when that which is in part shall be

done away, and we retrace them in the unerring light of eternity, they will appear to have tended to great and glorious issues, and be among the most grateful reminiscences of the past.

But let me not dismiss this subject without asking you, Christian reader, to pause and consider whether you are living in a practical dependence on Divine Providence? Are you deriving from your dependence the comforts it may impart? We have been considering the intercession and sympathy of Christ, and He is the God of providence. All your steps, if you are His, are ordered by Him, ordered with all the care and tenderness with which He sought you out and brought you to the faith and love of Him. He has left words of sympathy and comfort for you in every trial. You have no worldly difficulties which he has not been through before you. He is the good Shepherd who calls you to walk only

in the paths he has trod first. How consoling the thought that He, who has died for you and feels for you as redeemed by His blood, governs the world, and dispenses all events! Are you tempted or persecuted from the world, His loving voice is, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Are you in want, that voice is, "Behold the fowls of the air, they sow not, nor reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are you not much better than they? I too was poor, homeless and friendless, I had not even where to lay my head." Are you in perplexity what you shall do, whether this or that, the same voice is, "Commit thy way unto me, and I will bring it to pass. Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver." Are you filled with foreboding of coming distress, the same dear voice is, "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me; in

confidence shall be your strength; my grace shall be sufficient for you." Are you struck down with grief, has death taken from you the best beloved of earth, O this is a great desolation you feel! How unspeakably dear is that friend you can see no more? How precious now that sympathy and love no more to be yours! But do not refuse to be comforted by the tears of Jesus. See Him weep at the grave of buried friendship. See his tears starting with the tears of surviving mourners. O, my friend, do not grieve over much lest you should move to greater distress the tender heart of Jesus. He must partake of a sorrow like yours. He dearly looks towards you as though beseeching you to submit sweetly to this loss, and saying, "I have died that I might draw the sting of death, and dispel the gloom of the grave. I have done what I could to prepare you for the great necessity. It is the

way you and yours must go in coming to me. I know what it is; I have tasted death for you, and I taste it ever when you or yours die."

Thus does Jesus teach us to know and use his sympathy for our consolation; thus does he care for us and attemper all influences of his word and providence for the sweeter and safer conducting us through the world.

CHAPTER V.

LOVE THE SOLVENT OF GRIEF.—ITS COMPENSATING POWER ILLUSTRATED IN REAL LIFE.—ITS ATTRIBUTES.—ITS RESOURCES.—ITS ASSIMILATING POWER.—ITS VICTORIES AND JOYS.

So far as we have proceeded, we must be struck with the expense, the variety and aptness of the Divine provisions for our consolation under the griefs and trials of life. They all indicate the constant care of God for us, his exact and sympathising acquaintance with our frames, and his governing the world for the reduction of the evil and misery which sin has brought into it. Now that Christ has died and mercy can be extended to us without detriment to justice, God is so benignant, so condescending in all his deal-

ings as justly to invite the confidence and love of all rational creatures; nor should the guilt and conscious demerit of any deter them from coming to Him, since they deter not the proffers of his regard. He looks not with complacency on their ill doing, yet does he look complacently on the event of their turning to Him. All his dispensations, all the sorrows and trials of life and their natural working, when not prevented by us, illustrate this cheering truth. We may obscure it by our theories and reasonings; we may cover it up with a darkness of our own, yet I would hold it up as a glass which seems to concentrate all the rays of light that come to us—as the great resulting truth of all that is known or to be known of God.

Nor should it be forgotten that we are never dealt with according to our deserts. We are invited to Him by our severest trials,

yea, by our greatest losses we are invited to accept of what is better. Nor is there any indifference to what we suffer as creatures in making the exchange. Every way and every how is he kindly and sweetly disposed towards us in Christ Jesus. So affecting is the proof of this, that that must be the *loss of all things indeed* to which we are exposed, and a most needless loss on our part, if with all his care and readiness to save, and his agency for us, we become not co-workers with Him in this the cherished work of God.

He would have us love Him according to the worthiness there is in Him, and this is the end of all his dealings with us. This too is the mildest condition of a free and rational creature's blessedness. Think of it. Could you love Him less without injustice to your nature? You are free to love, but you are bound to love wisely. If you love that best

which is not best, can your nature improve as it might? Must not the end be the loss of something which might and ought to have been yours? If you love that which is not only not best but evil, must you not descend to it, and if you are destined to live on in this descending line, what will the disaster be at last? Loving that most which is most worthy to be loved, you are happy, you answer the demands of your moral nature, you escape the harm which inferior affections are apt to work, and you are ever ascending and assimilating to something higher and better than yourself. How reasonable then that we should love God, who is so worthy to be loved, that the best things we can love else are but distant and shadowy resemblances of Him, which we are indeed permitted to love because they are resemblances, and as such, give us some taste of what He is, and sweeten the duty we owe to Him!

Love is represented as the fulfilling of the law—a creature's perfection. All other graces, all Divine dispensations contribute to this, and are lost in it as in a heaven. It expels the dross of our nature; it overcomes sorrow; it is the full joy of our Lord.

Let us contemplate its capacities and resources as applied to the experience of life. Property and business may fail, and still the eye of hope may fix itself on other objects, and confidence may strengthen itself in other schemes, but when death enters into our family and loved ones are missing from our sight, though God may have made their bed in sickness, and established their hope in death, nothing can then relieve us but trust and love. Philosophy and pleasure do but intrude upon and aggravate our grief. But love, the light of God, may chase away the gloom of this hour, and start up in the soul trusts, which give the victory over ourselves.

The harp of the spirit though its cords be torn, never yields such sweet notes, such swelling harmony, as when the world can draw no music from it. How often do we see strokes fall on the heart, which it would be but mockery for man to attempt to relieve, and which yet served to unlock the treasures of that heart and reveal a sweetness to it, which it had not known before. See that mother. She loves and mourns as none but a mother can. Behold the greatness and the sweetness of her grief! Her child is dead, and she says "it is well with me, and it is well with my child. It is well because God has taken him; He has said 'of such is the kingdom of heaven,' that he doth not willingly afflict, and I know it must be well." Can there be any greatness greater than this? Did ever any prince at the head of invincible armies win a victory like it? Her heart is in heaviness and her

home is desolated, but she has been to her heavenly Father and unbosomed her griefs before him. There is peace on her saddened countenance, peace in her gentle words, the peace of God has come down and is filling her trusting soul. How sweet and soft is her sorrow, and how it softens and awes without agitating others!

We have heard of sick persons whose pains came upon them at certain periods with overwhelming force, who said it was then they felt the greatest comfort. Their whole soul was so concentrated in love and trust in God, that suffering could not rise "above what they were able to bear," but seemed itself borne away in the overflowing of their own love. We cannot conceive, much less can we describe the sufficiency of the love God shed abroad in the heart, to drown the sense of grief.

It is related that on a small, and rocky,

and almost inaccessible island, is the residence of a poor widow. The passage of the place is exceedingly dangerous to vessels, and her cottage is called the "Lighthouse," from the fact that she uniformly keeps a lamp burning in her little window at night. Early and late she may be seen trimming her lamp with oil, lest some misguided bark may perish through her neglect. For this she asks no reward. But her kindness stops not here. When any vessel is wrecked, she rests not till the chilled mariners come ashore to share her little board, and be warmed by her glowing fire. This poor woman in her younger, perhaps not happier days, though happy they must have been, for sorrow cannot lodge in such a heart, witnessed her husband struggling with the waves and swallowed up by the remorseless billows,

"In sight of home and friends who thronged to save."

This directed her benevolence towards

those who brave the dangers of the deep; this prompted her present devoted and solitary life, in which her only, her sufficient enjoyment is in doing good. Sweet and blessed fruit of bereavement! What beauty is here! a loveliness I would little speak of, but more revere! a flower crushed indeed, yet sending forth its fragrance to all around! Truly, as the sun seems greatest in his lowest estate, so did sorrow enlarge her heart and make her appear the more noble, the lower it brought her down. We cannot think she was unhappy, though there was a remembered grief in her heart. A grieved heart may be a richly stored one. Where charity abounds, misery cannot.

"Such are the tender woes of love,
Fost'ring the heart, they bend."

It is a common remark that riches contract the heart, and the poor are too apt to think so, not considering the many and

nameless advantages they receive directly or indirectly from the rich. If the heart be right the more we acquire the more freely shall we give. The disposition which would hoard millions, would also hoard pennies, and doat on them as treasures. A liberal heart will have a liberal hand, be it full or empty. The most beautiful examples of charitable living are found alike among the rich and the poor. None are so low or so destitute but that they may equal the princes of the earth in charity. Their mites may even outstrip in their beauty and reward, the largest bestowings of the wealthy. If riches make us proud and forgetful of our ill-deservings, they will harden the heart, but if they be received as the largesses of heaven, and our unworthiness be deeply tasted in them, we shall delight to use them for the good of others. This principle is equally applicable to all the

changes of our condition. Things harm us, not that there is any harm in them, but that we abuse them. As we acquire importance of any kind, we are prone to think more of ourselves, and thus lose the virtues which solaced our former state, and enabled us to rise above it. Both the ill and the good effects of an improved condition are often seen.

An Irish schoolmaster, who, whilst poor himself, had given gratuitous instruction to certain poor children, when increased in worldly goods, began to complain of the service, and said to his wife, he could not afford to give it any longer for nothing,—who replied: "O! James, don't say the like o' that—don't; a poor scholar never came into the house that I did'nt feel as *if he brought fresh air from heaven with him*—never miss the bit I gave them—my heart warms to the soft, homely sound of

their bare feet on the floor, and the door almost opens of itself to let them in."

A sentiment so beautiful could not fail to express itself beautifully. The prosperity which contracted his heart, enlarged hers. Her love was moved and beautified by it; it turned her serving into joy;

"As the great sun, when he his influence
Sheds on the frost-bound waters.—The glad stream
Flows to the ray, and warbles as it flows."

In her gentle reproving and her gentler spirit well does she answer the description,—

"A perfect woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command;
And yet a spirit, still, and bright,
With something of an angel light."

Nothing seems so to welcome the duties of life as humility, and nothing seems so to ennoble, as nothing so befits the human spirit.

"The bird that sings on highest wing
Builds on the ground her lowly nest,
And she that doth most sweetly sing,
Sings in the shade when all things rest;
In lark and nightingale we see
What honour hath humility."

A pious lady who had lost her husband, was for a time inconsolable. She could not think, scarcely could she speak of any thing but him. Nothing seemed to take her attention but the three promising children he had left her, imaging to her his presence, his look, his love. But soon these were all taken ill and died within a few days of each other, and now the childless mother was calmed even by the greatness of the stroke. The hand of God was thus made visible to her. She could see nothing but his work in the dispensation. Thus was the passion of her grief allayed. Her indisposition to speak of her loss, her solemn

repose, was the admiration of all beholders. The Lord had not slain her; he had slain what to some mothers is more than life, that in which the sweets of life were treasured up, that which she would give life to redeem, and yet could she say, "I will trust in Him." As the lead that goes quickly down to the ocean's depth, ruffles its surface less than lighter things, so the blow which was strongest, did not so much disturb her calm of mind, but drove her to its proper trust.

We had a friend loved and lovely. He had genius and learning. He had all qualities, great and small, blending in a most attractive whole — a character as much to be loved as admired, as truly gentle as it was great, and so combining opposite excellencies that each was beautified by the other. Between him and her who survives him there was a reci-

procity of taste and sympathy—a living in each other, so that her thoughts seemed but the pictures of his—her mind but a glass that showed the very beauty that looked into it, or rather became itself that beauty. Dying in his dying, she did not all die. Her love, the heart's animation, lifted her up; her sense of loss was merged for a while in her love and confidence of his good estate. In strong and trusting thoughts of him as a happy spirit, and of God as his and her portion, she rested as in a cloud. A falling from this elevation, was truly a coming to one's self from God —a leaving of heaven for earth. Let her tell the rest in words as beautiful as they are true to nature. "My desolating loss I realize more and more. For many weeks his peaceful and triumphant departure left such an elevating influence on my mind, that I could only think of him

as a pure and happy spirit. But now my feelings have become more selfish, and I long for the period to arrive, when I may lie down by his side and be re-united in a nobler and more enduring union than *even that* which was ours here."

Thus does the mind when it ceases to look upward, fall from its elevation. Thus is the low note of sadness heard running through all the music of life, when ourselves are the instruments we play upon. The sorrow that deepens not love, and runs not off with it, must ever flood the spirit and bear it down. Our best and sweetest life, that which we live in the good of others, is richly stocked with charities. The life which we live in ourselves, that which depends on our stores, is master only of chaff and smoke, when they are taken away, and destitute of that last relieving accommodation, a resigned spirit. The

young man whom Jesus told to sell all his goods and give to the poor, and he should have treasure in heaven, should be truly enriched—"was sad at that saying." He understood not the riches of love, which never feels itself so wealthy, as when it has expended all in obedience to the commands it honours; never so well furnished against want and sorrow, as when best assured of the approbation of its object. In that we are creatures, we see how poor we must be, having nothing laid up in the Creator. Selfishness is poverty; it is the most utter destitution of a human being. It can bring nothing to his relief; it adds soreness to his sorrows; it sharpens his pains; it aggravates all the losses he is liable to endure, and when goaded to extremes, often turns destroyer and strikes its last blows on himself. It gives us nothing to rest in or to fly to, in trouble; it turns

our affections on ourselves, self on self, as the sap of a tree descending out of season from its heavenward branches, and making not only its life useless, but its growth downward.

If there is any thing about us which good hearts will reverence, it is our grief on the loss of those we love. It is a condition in which we seem to be smitten by a Divine hand, and thus made sacred. It is a grief too, which greatly enriches the heart, when rightly borne. There may be no rebellion of the will, the sweetest sentiments towards God and our fellow beings, may be deepened, and still the desolation caused in the treasured sympathies and hopes of the heart, gives a new colour to the entire scene of life. The dear affections which grew out of the consanguinities and connexions of life, next to those we owe to God, are the most sacred of our being; and if the hopes and revelations of a future

state, did not come to our aid, our grief would be immoderate and inconsolable, when these relations are broken by death.

But we are not left to sorrow in darkness. Death is as the foreshadowing of life. We die that we may die no more. So short too is our life here, a mortal life at best, and so endless is the life on which we enter at death, an immortal life, that the consideration may well moderate our sorrow at parting. All who live must be separated by the great appointment, and if the change is their gain, we poorly commend our love to them, more poorly our love to Christ, who came to redeem them and us, for the end of taking us to his rest, if we refuse to be comforted. Yes, it is selfish to dwell on our griefs as though some strange thing had happened to us, as though they were too important to be relieved, or it were a virtue to sink under them. I would revere all grief of this kind, yet

I would say there is such a thing as a *will* of cherishing it, which makes it rather killing than improving in its effect. This may be done under a conceit of duty or gratitude to the dead. It may be done as a sacrifice to what we deem is expected of us, or as a thing becoming in the eyes of others. But that bereavement seems rather sanctified which saddens not the heart over much, and softens without withering it; which refuses no comfort or improvement we can profitably receive, and imposes no restraints on the rising hopes of the heart; which, in short, gives way and is lost in an overgrowth of kind and grateful affections.

If the morning of life has a mantle of grey,
  Its noon will be blither and brighter,
If March has its storm, there is sunshine in May,
  And light out of darkness is lighter:
Thus the present is pleasant, a cheerful to-day,
  With a wiser, a soberer gladness,
Because it is tinged with the mellowing ray
  Of a yesterday's sunset of sadness.

TUPPER.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPACITIES OF LOVE.—THE BEAUTY AND STRENGTH OF ITS WORKING.

I HAVE introduced these examples from life to give a practical insight of the sweet working of the affections within us. If we could so die to self that every passion and desire should be subordinate to love, it would be our exemption from most of the evils we complain of; it would at least deliver us from that impatience which sharpens and magnifies them.

I cannot properly set forth, I cannot extol as I would this capacity of our nature for overcoming evil and gaining to itself every good. And when I consider it is the

design and manifest working of all our painful experience to purify and strengthen this as the pure element of heaven within us, I know not how to speak of the beauty and resources of that goodness which worketh in us a passion in which we not only resemble perfection, but may go on to possess it. There are limits to our advancement in every thing but love. Whatever else we can possess or know is no protection against sorrow and despair, but this sheds a light and a cheering about the heart, which no calamity can expel. Out of the greatest distresses it comes a victor, laden with the spoils of every foe. From the dust our bed, and the flesh our prison, it enables us to rise and soar as in a heaven of our own. Other joys are like meteors in the night, like flashes of lightning which only serve to reveal the darkness, but this forms a part of ourselves, mingles with the

whole tissue of our life, and works in us a stock of enjoyments which can never fail. It drives us out of ourselves, and sets us roaming the universe to make it ours in thought, to gather from it the sweets on which it thrives.

Selfishness or worldly sorrowing drives us back and shuts us up within ourselves. Confiding, disinterested love is a creating power, wanting in no expedients to serve our need. It is the spring of the intellect, the mind ever springing from good to better. If we hate, we deprive ourselves of something of which love gives us the possession. It is an all-possessing principle. It finds in all things something to rejoice in. In forgiving it recovers what was lost; in enduring it conquers; in expending it increases; in admiring it takes possession. Harmony, truth, beauty, excellence and the like, become ours through the loving perception of

them, and love sharpens the mind's sight for them, or reveals them where without loving we should not see them. The seeing of what is lovely or excellent is, for the moment at least, a possession of these qualities, and seeing them with approbation and desire, prolongs their possession. Consciousness tells us so much as true.

God in whom all that is great and lovely and pure in thought, in essence and in action, is revealed in his word, in forms to suit our sympathy and perceptions, and in his works as with ten thousand concording voices; and if we are all ear and all mind to Him, what discoverers of truth, what proficients in excellence, what holders of happiness must we become! Our thoughts can go and come, though all that may be seen and all that may be known, discovering what is worthy to be loved, and followed in their shining lead, yea, speeded therein by the

joying, exulting recipients of their conquests,—our heart's best affections.

I have said the perception of any good quality is in some sort our present possession of it. If we see a lovely virtue we feel one and the same at the moment, and when as in God there is a confluence of all beauties and perfections, the meditation of Him, the study of what may be known of Him, will be a possessing ourselves of Him, through a love, sweetening his words to our taste, bathing us in his perfection, and clothing us with his beams, till we become "light in the Lord," and have in us no darkness at all, as heaven has no need of the sun for the lustre of the purity that is gathered therein.

What a resource then is here against the griefs and disasters of life? They may be very strong, they may bear down the stoutest hearts, yet love is strong enough to take

them up and bear them as a "very little thing." There is no weakness, no poverty in love. Its sources of strength are every where, and it rallies to them with the speed of thought. Its legions of reserve are at command, and it comes up with force increased in proportion to the difficulty to be overcome, yea, gathers strength from conflict, brings sweetness out of the bitterest dregs, its honey from the lion's jaws—a *Sampson's honey* indeed.

How much good companionship, if it be a loving one, redeems us from what is low and evil, and elevates us to a worthy inheritance of the qualities of our companion, is testified by the debasement wrought in us through evil companionship if it be *chosen*, and by the price the wise will pay to escape it. We may compass the treasures of thought and feeling lodged in all books and make them ours by a kind of storing

process, and not have the life, the feeling from which they spring, not gain the mastery, the power of producing the like, which the loving contact of the great imparts, the minding of the living inspires and makes ours through the appropriating affections, —the genial aspiring which ascends, not knowing it ascends, and drinks of inspiration, not knowing it is the effluence of spirit itself.

You may have books to learn from, but give me the free converse of great and pure minds, and if I have any thing noble, any thing on which their vestal fire can catch, I shall burn and lose all my dross in the trial. Give me the love of meditating on the good, the great; the sight to find the true, the beautiful, the divine in every thing, and if I do not become wise as no learning can make me, it will be because *seeing I do not see*, because I think not and dis-

cover not as a "living spirit," because "twice dead and plucked up by the roots," the contact, the infusion of life itself will not revive me.

But if I may so improve by good communications; if the port, the sensibility, the virtue of others may become mine, as I cannot tell how or why, save that I love them, am in them and they in me in a sort of mingled life, what may I not become when God, in whom all beauty, all that should be loved, has its original and perfection, is the object on which my thoughts attend by day and by night; when He deigns to dwell in me, as spirit only can dwell in spirit, richly by his fruits and virtues, perfecting his strength in the conscious want of mine; when He calls and I hear, yea, speaks as with a brother's voice, and face to face in Jesus Christ, revealing Himself to my sympathies, my sight, my

faith, as all in all? Here is a companionship one would think sufficient to preserve us from the corruption of the world, to awe down the risings of evil within us, and rewarding our devotion with such strong consolation as should beguile us of the sense of sorrow, and overmaster all inferior attachments.

If the return of our love be as our possession of its object, our admission to its presence, as the strength of two hearts, the mingling of two flames in one, then must our affections lift themselves up to God with a perpetual aspiring, for He loves us with a love compared with which, the love of creatures with all its sweetness and its strength, is treasureless and cold—a love which would not only give Himself to us, but make us worthy of the gift. He is most unworthy of our regard who is not more ambitious to merit than to gain it; he

loves not nor can love, who seeks his own more than another's good, and does not sweetly sink himself to exalt his object, and here is a love that weighs not our deservings, comes down to our poor estate, asks not any thing that we have, engages to make us worthy of itself, and gives us, even what it exacts, our love again. Wonderful love! Itself both our teacher and our joy—enriching us when we have a sense that we are poor, as it is only then we can enjoy gifts; exalting us when we are humble, as it is only then we can profit by exaltation; strengthen us when we know our weakness, as it is only then we will use his help; returning to us when we will return to Him, as it is only then that He can bind us to our duty,—such is the love of God to us, giving us all the good that we may safely have, and making us the better for all He gives—our example and our blessedness forevermore!

Now, if his love towards us has so many aspects of beauty that there can be nothing beautiful which does not proceed therefrom, then our loving Him must make Him so beautiful as that we can see, can desire no other beauty, for He is love, and it is but Him we see in all that is worthy to be loved. If genuine love has power to transform the nature of the lover into the thing beloved, (and we know it has,) uniting and making him over through some secret and inward working, so that we are ever sinking down or rising to the quality of our objects,—the love of the world making us worldly, and the love of heaven making us heavenly,—then shall he who loves God,

"Divine contemplate and become divine."

Nor shall he want aids and encouragements in the process. His love is a fountain of joy and strength, and it has this excellent

nature in it, that it gives a relish to every thing he does, sweetens his service, or rather is a sweetness in him that comes of serving, and makes serving sweet. And we see not that he can become weary, or his love cool so long as its object is in view, for it has the art of decking what it falls on with ever growing beauty, of making every thing seem greater and lovelier, which is seen through it, and yet sees all things through itself. How then shall we not love Him, and feel his love giving us "songs in the night," and enabling us to cry from the depths of affliction, "O Lord, let the beams of Thy Majesty so shine into my mind, that it may ever depend confidently on Thee. Let my faults by Thy hand be corrected. Let Thy will be done on me and in me to the joyful embracing of what sorrow Thou will have me endure. Let my enemies prevail against me and my pain be the

sweetness of their revenge, if my calamity be but the exercise of my virtue, and their wickedness turn me not from my trust and joy in Thee."

In noble natures, the source of tears at all times lies nearer the heart than that of joy, but when made nobler by the love of God, they often seem to covet affliction, to "glory in tribulation," not merely as the profitable dispensing of his hand, but as in some sort a revenge on themselves, that they no more love Him, and are no more worthy of his love. Never does one appear so truly noble and happy as when most truly subjected to the will of God; in nothing does he so rule as in the authority to which he submits—the sway of love in him, which the more complete it is, the less is his feeling of subjection. This is the liberty wherewith Christ makes us free, and it is a liberty compared with which, all, that men call

such, is slavery. The happiness that flows from it is like a spring of water, so pure it tastes of nothing but itself, so self-supporting that though imparting itself to all who come to it, it seems undiminished by all it spares.

A love having so many excellent qualities and powers, commanding so many helps to its own growth, and working in us by sweet assimilation the blessedness to which it aspires, is surely our chiefest treasure. It is the affluence of the soul, the abounding fullness of every good, which is bringing us off from our sorrows and corruptions, and enabling us in some sort spiritually to dwell safely with ravenous beasts, to go through fires, to tread on serpents and scorpions unstung and unharmed.

In all troubles and dangers let us then not forget the supports and defences that may be laid up in themselves. Our griefs

are for the most part such as no external applications or advantages can reach or relieve. The sympathy of friends often raises the tide of sorrow, but never stays it. It is consoling to some minds to have the participation of others in their distress, but it is too apt to be a selfish relief which they thus gain. If a whole community should pause and take to sorrowing on their behalf, the danger is it would add to their self-love and consequence, cause them to put on the appearance of deepened grief as an outward propriety, but it could not touch the source of a single pang; it could yield nothing worthy of the name of consolation. They rather act the wiser and nobler part, who seek not observation, who shun the participation of others in their grief, and when they see they have it, lose sight of their own in concern for what they are causing. This is the starting of a disin-

terested love, carrying them out of themselves; a breaking up of sorrow at its fountain, and the heart feels its gentle healing at once. Our stronghold then is in ourselves; in the exercise of self-forgetful and consoling affection, lifting us up to God as the dispenser of our trials, and if we can feel He is "all our salvation and all our desire," that will be our remedy, our victory over any calamity that may befall us. As great a good as He can make Himself to a creature, so great a good does our love of Him attain; and surely, if all other good things are as nothing to Him, and are good only as they resemble Him, He can compensate us for any thing He may lay on us or take from us; He can so communicate Himself to us, so empower and draw out our love to Him, that we shall dwell in Him and He in us, shall lose our sense of pain, and all other things, their power of harming.

His love to us is so attested that it made an apostle resolve to know nothing else, to count all things but loss for the excellency of it in Christ Jesus. Let us too fix our eyes upon it, till our eyes affect our hearts; till, as we are musing, the fire begins to burn. Let us meditate upon the amazing love of our dying Saviour, till, losing sight of our griefs in the greatness of his, endured for us, our souls are kindled with reciprocal flames wherein we may offer up ourselves, in turn, as living sacrifices to Him, and our hearts be rooted and grounded in love, and transported with the sweetness thereof, to the praise of the glory of his grace. Then shall our gloom retire as before the presence of light. Then shall there be no hardness, no destruction in our sorrow. Then shall smiles, sweeter than those of friends and lovers, be ever greeting our trusting eyes.

Such are the properties and rewards of

our love. It is a charity which receives its beauty and its merit from its object; which has its honour in its aims, and which, failing of all else, has a rich stock of enjoyment in itself. Its object too, ever grows more beautiful and worthy to its view; and like the bee, it is ever busy to carry to it the sweetness of all flowers and treasure it there.

CHAPTER VII.

DIVINE GOODNESS DISPLAYED IN OUR SUFFERINGS—THEIR USES AND RESULTS.

Nothing is more manifest than that He who set the planets in their orbits, and hung the world upon nothing—He in whom we live and move and have our being, deserves our reverence and worship. Nothing is more certain than that He who maketh the heavens to declare his glory, and to show forth his handiwork, should receive glory from the intelligent creatures whom He has set to learn his character in his works. The voice of nature, if she had utterance, would be the voice of praise, and we who behold her beauty and feel her inspiration, should hymn her praise. In all her diver-

sified ministry to our comfort, in the beauty that surrounds us, in the care that watches over us, we see the goodness and providence of God, and should be inspired with a gratitude to Him, as ceaseless as his unceasing kindnesses. So much silent nature teaches as our duty, but she cannot reveal the consequences of our disobedience. She may give some uncertain guesses, but that is all. Her light reaches only to the grave, but revelation meets her there, and shows that is only a dark entry to a throne of judgment. What was before but dimly known, what had not existed even in thought or dream, is, by the word of the Spirit, made manifest and certain, so that, we are without the pretence of any excuse, if we know and love not God.

The more light He gives from Himself, the more evident is it that we must be miserable unless reconciled to Him. All the light and

wealth of his provisions in Christ for us, which we have been contemplating, great as is the comfort they are adapted to afford, are yet demonstrations of the greatness of the misery we must experience from the neglect of them. Our misimprovement of the light of nature, and our neglect of the provisions of revelation, are not more proofs of our guilt, than they are of the sufferings we must endure if we are reformed and made happy at last. The way of our choice, the things we have set up in the place of God, show not only our extreme guilt, for which we must be deeply grieved before we can see it for ourselves, but that He can gain no access to our hearts till He has embittered the experience of what we have so freely chosen. Such is our nature, that He cannot make us happy or better, till He has first sickened us with the things we prefer to Him.

Behold then the goodness of God in mak-

ing the "way of transgressors hard;" in hedging with thorns the way to perdition; in defeating our plans of worldly repose; in all the experience He gives to make us feel that we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth! Should he do less than make ours a life of affliction, while it is one of disservice to Him, the proofs of His benevolence towards us would be wholly obscured. When, therefore, we consider how much enjoyment is mingled with the sorrows of our condition, we should be overcome with the manifestation of the truth that "He doth not willingly afflict nor grieve the children of men."

We are told that "God is love," and if we rightly understand his dispensations, we shall be convinced that what He does only not excels what He is. We shall see this truth illustrated in all the afflictive events of life, if we observe their working.

I can only trace it here in a few things, but they may serve to establish the principle, which may be indefinitely applied to our experience. There is a feeling of security engendered by prosperity, which disposes us to forget God. We regard not the fountain till the cisterns begin to fail. Mariners have no fear, no thought of God, till the sea begins to swell and the waves threaten to devour them; then they cry to the Lord who alone can deliver them out of distress. The pleasures and benefits of health are seldom prized till we lose them. Our daily food, our freedom from bodily pain, are blessings so common that our hearts are but slightly affected by them; but when sickness comes and takes away our strength and our taste for food, how often do we wonder that we could have prized health so little, or have taken so much as a cup of water without feeling that it was a blessing

indeed. Our past ingratitude astonishes us now, and we think if we are ever restored, we shall not forget again the goodness of the Lord. Our hearts too are lifted up with the pride of our successes; we have little sympathy for the misfortunes of others; but adversity comes and we are brought down, our pride is humbled, and our judgment of others is more charitable. A dear friend is laid low by disease. It brings the whole household to reflection, every heart is moved with compassion, all enmity, all memory of wrong is forgotten, not a virtue of life, not a good sensibility of the heart but is exercised by the event. Two brothers loved each other—the older seemed to live to encourage the younger—and the younger took his will as the rule of his life. They knew each other's thoughts and communed as if each loved the other better than himself. But there was a separation. The

approbation which had been the law of the youth's heart was forever withdrawn. Thus was his ambition dried up. He had been living to please one who was no more. To him now there were no charms in success, and no sweets in praise. Thus did he first learn that he was without God in the world.

So we might go on to any extent in exhibiting the moral effects of God's dealings with us, but only think what would be the result, if instead of the experience He gives us, our life had a certain duration, we had no disease and pain, no disappointments in our hopes and affections, and no wants and distresses to bring us low. The supposition is enough to fill us with admiration of the goodness and wisdom of God in all his appointments.

We are told if we love God "all things shall work together for our good" and there is a visible tendency to this result in all his

dispensations. The promise is that all things together, not any one thing separately, shall work for our good. A thing may appear to be evil, and yet be an important link in the chain of events that shall so work. There are various kinds of good. The good which relates to this life may be withheld, and yet our ultimate good be promoted, which is the good contained in the promise. There can be no greater good than this, conferred on a creature, and whatever tends to promote this, works for our good, though it may seem to be evil and grievous. Nothing would more tenderly affect us than this truth, if we could see the dependencies of the many links in the chain that draws us to heaven.

Our state is one of trial, and if God did not try us, He could not magnify his grace in us. We should know little of our corruption, little of our pride and unbelief, little of the

misery from which we are raised. The trial of our faith is more precious than that of gold. If we could now see as we shall when all is over, we should see that all our bereavements and troubles are only so many parts of a great system of events by which we are borne along in our upward course, and prepared for the glory of God and the joys of his kingdom.

Let us then know the weakness of our faith, and cleave the closer to our trust under every trial. True faith feels its weakness, and fears to walk without leaning on the arm of its Beloved. He lets you stumble a little and be troubled; He sometimes amazes you with danger that you may cry unto Him, and know better where your deliverance is. So precious is the trial of your faith, and so does He strengthen it by all the pressure He lays upon it. Your desires after Him out of your distresses, are but the heavings

of that life, which He breathed into you when He said, "Live!" The faith of all your prayers is nerved by the power of Him from whom your relief comes. Oh that every troubled soul, every languishing and fearing saint, would think of this, and look with larger desires to Him for spiritual strength and comfort! You would, when you had gazed but a little, see the hand of grace stretched out for you. The heavens would be opened and a mystical ladder would appear, and angels be descending and ascending with messages of love and supplies of strength.

Nothing is more certain than that chastisements are to be regarded among the *privileges* of the redeemed. They are not awarded as the wages, though they are the consequences of sin; they are subordinate to mercy, and sent for purposes of good. They come not as messengers of displea-

sure, but as tokens of love; and in dispensing them, God acts not as an offended judge, but as a forgiving father. They are intended to work "the peaceable fruits of righteousness" in those who are "exercised thereby," so that they can say, "He hath done all things well," and "in very faithfulness He hath afflicted us." Their afflictions have a moral effect on others through their example, and a direct moral end in their own experience. By the sadness He gives them, "their heart is made better;" and just in proportion as their spiritual improvement exceeds in value mere physical or worldly good, should their gratitude for the benefit conferred, exceed their grief on account of what is inflicted.

This must be the right view for you to take of your trials, as you are assured "This is the will of God concerning you, even your sanctification," and the same must

needs be his will in all the dealings of his providence. "God chastens us not for his pleasure, but for our profit, that *we might be partakers of his holiness.*" This is the whole design of your afflictions,—their ultimate benefit to you and others. That God designs to make you partakers of his nature is also the highest proof of his affection; and to know that your chastening is appointed to perfect this resemblance to Him, should yield the sweetest consolation.

Now that affliction is *fitted* to work this resemblance in us, might be inferred from the fact that God in his wisdom employs it for this purpose. He has no pleasure in our griefs, "He afflicts not willingly," and we cannot therefore suppose He would choose this method if it were not the wisest and best. It is by disappointing our hopes from the world, that God abates our love of it, brings us to serious reflection, and reveals

the evil and unbelief of our hearts. The process is at times painful, many dear affections are wounded, many high anticipations are clouded, but it is all only "for a season." The trial cannot be long, and it is all the while making us meet for a better inheritance, when "beauty shall be appointed for ashes, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." Such is "the raiment of wrought gold," which comes of the trial of our faith and patience here.

The greatness of the pain we experience in the crossing of our desires and in parting with cherished objects, shows that we needed the trial; that our affections were too strongly setting towards the world. The things that are taken from us, and for which we grieve so much, are all the good gifts of God, and if we cannot enjoy them, still loving Him more, He may not continue them to us, without permitting us to lose the best good

He can confer. He offers us a good in comparison with which, all others are as nothing, but it is a good which we can obtain only on condition of prizing it more than all. He must either take off our affections from inferior objects, and make them as steps for our ascending to Him, or let us perish in our choice.

As parents, we would not let our children be spoiled in the use of the good things we give them, nor will God suffer his children long and fatally to harm themselves with his gifts. Believers are all his children under age; some are poor in circumstances; some are elevated in their position and have influence over others; some are ignorant and slow to learn, and others are hasty and unyielding in their tempers, but till they are of age, till the time of their inheritance comes, He suits his dispensations to the end of their training, never through impatience

correcting them, never through caprice denying and crossing them, never through weakness complying with their importunities, but ever severely watchful against the slightest approach of harm to them. Should He give them all they desire, it would be their ruin. Should he let them take their living and wander in "a far country" and find no "famine" there, they would never return, or think of the "abundance" in their father's house.

If then it be wise for us to pursue the greatest good, is it not kind in God to lift off our burdens, and to mingle bitterness with the pleasures which tend to make us linger? Is He not kind, and kind as no friend was ever kind before, in waking us from unsafe repose, in hastening us on with his rod, in giving wings to the objects we attempt to grasp by the way, and which, if taken and retained, would defeat our better aims? Surely

goodness beams forth in all the proceedings of the Lord. We should take kindly all his dispensations. We would run into evil but He wills our deliverance. We would remain in darkness, but He surrounds us with light. We would be ignorant of the enemy that is in our camp, but He sounds the alarm. We would grow to patterns of our own, but He fashions us as vessels for favored use. He gives, and He withholds; He frowns, and He smiles, and yet in effect "no good thing is withheld from them that fear Him." All things work together for their good. They are gainers when they lose, and no losers when they gain. He is conducting them by an invisible working to the best rewards, and the measures He adopts are never more painful than He sees to be most promotive of the end. To them He sends afflictions, as He does his angels, that they may minister to them on their

way to heaven, and they are to receive them as the evidences of his paternal care, and the pledges of his love; "for whom He loveth He chasteneth."

They are to be humbled, but it is that they may be "exalted in due time." They are to suffer, but it is "that their joy may be full." They are to serve, but it is that they may be fitted "to reign." They are to be emptied and denied of all self, but it is that they may be filled with "the fullness of God."

The sum then of all their sorrows is this, —that they are denied lesser, to prepare them for greater goods; their inferior enjoyments are embittered or taken away, to sharpen their relish and looking for those which are full, unmixed and eternal. Thus it is that their "light afflictions" which are but for a moment, for time at most, "work out for them a far more exceeding and eter-

nal weight of glory." Well does experience attest the truth of the inspired word! Sweetly does God make true his promises to the believer's heart! Wonderfully wise and kind is the working of his grace and providence! Let us enter into the sweetness that is treasured in the theme and extract as it were a hidden solace from our tears. Let us bear hardship as good and manful soldiers of the cross. Let us cease thinking that our life is in ourselves, that we have any individual existence. Our humanity has been transferred to God, our life is hid with Him in Christ, and living should be but the making of us over more and more to Him. We are not alone in any thing; we are never left or forsaken in this mystical union of our humanity. It is a wonderful thing indeed, yet are there in it growth, sympathy and consolation, transmitting to us as it were the life and strength of God.

His justice might, but his love will not let us do as we will. It follows us in our waywardness, and when by tenderness it cannot, with the rod it procures our return. It is not our happiness as we choose it, depending on things lower than ourselves, but our happiness as wrought in us, and outstarting in the growth of life, which He is concerned to secure for us. We have virtues and graces to form and establish, and He tries them, and puts force on them to give them strength. We have patience, and when it has "its perfect work," how sweet and beautiful it is, and yet how meagre would be its growth, how obscure would be the lessons it teaches, if He did not cross and break it into service? We have a hope which steadys us when our foundations rock, but what virtue would it have, if He did not cloud its objects and hold them from our grasp? We have gentleness and forgiveness,

but how would they break away and be overborne by the wrongs of life, if He did not draw and confine us with the lines of duty? We have love, but how would it be diffused and lose itself on creatures and their thousand charms, if He did not mar them with decay and snatch them from our view?

Thus is bitterness mingled with so many of the streams and sweets of life, lest our virtues should have too tender a growth and fail under the burden and heat of the day. Thus do we see that our trials are, for the most part, needful to the exercise and proof of our virtues. If any view of our crosses and griefs can give us comfort, this ought; if any thing can bind up our wounds and dispel our gloom, it is the thought, that they are the wise disposals of Him who does all things in pursuance of our good. When denied the objects we cherish; when these bodies are wasting with disease or racked

with pain; when troubled on every side, it should be enough, that like our Divine Master we are to "learn obedience from the things we suffer," and be perfected through the same; that our sufferings worthily borne will improve and exercise our best virtues, prepare us for and entitle us to the best rewards; so fulfilling the inspired words, that "if we suffer together with Christ, we shall also together be glorified with Him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him."

What more can be said? We could not safely enjoy more or suffer less. We could order nothing so well as it is ordered for us. God bestows his gifts on us not considering our deserts; He takes them away in pursuance of our welfare, not complying with our desires or delighting in our griefs. Purely looking at our good, He never imposes any burden on us, or dispenses any pain to us, but when wisdom and goodness call for it. Our

parts then are to rejoice in the disposals of his hand, to know the duties He gives us to perform, and when smitten with his rod, to yield, like "the plants that throw their fragrance from the wounded part," some peculiar sweetness to the strokes of woe. So shall our will be done in his and his in ours; so shall all bitterness be extracted from our woes, and we be soothed by our easing pains; so shall light be sown upon our darkened path as "morning glories steal, beam after beam, upon the yielding night."

The faith of Christ is the power which enables us to overcome all foes to our peace. It spreads over the world the bright shadowing of better things to come. It brings down to us the spirit of Christ, and in that spirit we can endure all troubles, and find in them the renewing of our strength. As shaken trees root deeper; as the blast that beats down the flame causes

it to rise higher, so does faith enable us, when brought low by adversity, either to mount upwards, or to bind ourselves more closely and sweetly to the Rock we are resting on.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCLUDING REMARKS ON GROWTH IN GRACE. IMPORTANCE OF ATTENTION TO DIVINE THINGS.

A CHARGE against the wicked is, "that God is not in all their thoughts," and a mark of the righteous is that they delight to think upon his name, and to own him in all their ways. If we consult the lives of distinguished saints, we are struck with the evidence of this truth. It is not in their activity and zeal so much as in their thoughtfulness, their eyeing of Providence in every thing, that their distinction consists. Herein is a great defect of Christians of the present time. There is too little of a patient, habitual, and nourishing meditation on divine

things. The age is stirring and inventive. The mind is moving in perpetual eddies, feeding on excitement, and ever feeble and famishing without it. None are exempt from the general movement, and the tastes and habitudes it engenders. That the power of religion to console, enlighten, and appropriate the whole man, will not be found in this animal and mental whirl, is a result which shows itself in a readiness to catch at and lose ourselves in the motions of strife; in a predominance of intellectual over spiritual life, and in the wasting and dying that attends on our sorrows.

Great discoveries in science and art are made by eyeing nature and catching her suggestions. Great results of mind come into it through prolonged attention, or are the products of a power which the food of the mind has concealed and strengthened within itself, till it is ours as the strength of the body

is ours, though collected from the nourishment and exercise of years. So in regard to our spiritual nature, its improvement, and the great results we may attain therein, this law of attention, of eyeing the excellence on which the soul feeds; this being with the object of our love, and taking in its shining till we have become strong and joyful, we hardly know how, is the sole condition of our advancement.

Let any one reflect on the case and he must feel it to be so. We may trouble ourselves with questions, and so do little and think little. There is however no difficulty, and need be no perplexity in regard to things we may and ought to know. We are no more dependent on God in matters spiritual, than we are in all the motions and plans of life, and it is our great encouragement that we are no less so. Our dependence is of such a nature, that, while it leaves

us free, it encourages and aids us to what is good. The strength of the believer is in his dependence, so that he is able to say, "when I am weak then am I strong." Out of his very weakness springs his confidence, like a creation out of nothing.

The grace or strength of God in him is such a thing as he will misconceive, if he contemplates it as something separate from himself. It runs in his exercises, and in those exercises is his strength. His love and confidence towards God, are the power of God in him, and if they be strong, there can be no weakness in him at all; no enemy can gain advantage over him; no grief or disaster can cast him down. As his love is not cooled, nor his trust taken away, he not only "inherits all things," but overcomes them all, yea, the dying of all that is mortal is but a victory with him.

Consider then what encouragements to

attain this happy estate may be presented. In intellectual attainments we may rise, through the application of our minds, above the masses around us, and become the admiration of the age, yet everywhere and in everything is our progress stayed, so that, he who knows most but learns to feel how little he knows. In love, in faith, in holiness there is no limit to our attainments but in perfection. As there is not an object in nature but reveals some of the Creator's perfections, so there is none but may become food to our love and knowledge of Him. The mind in search of Him, like the bee visiting the most unsightly as well as the most beautiful objects for the same end, may find Him in everything as a sweetness to be extracted for its use. Seeing Him in every object and in every event adoringly, is but the taking from Him the nurturing and the growth of our spiritual graces. It is the musing after

which the fire begins to burn, the burning of our hearts within us as the words of wisdom enter the *listening* ear.

Attention then to sacred things is the method of the souls feeding on them. Through this it makes its approaches, its acquaintance with them, and through this, dwells with them in a sort of heavenly conversation. As objects of mental investigation are not mastered by sudden invasion, but unfold and disclose themselves to the attending mind, as by some mysterious visitation or report from them to it, so spiritual truths and essences brighten, magnify, and endear themselves as precious realities to the mind that watches for them, and holds them in attention. If a relish of them pre-exist, the thinking on them, the entertaining of them, the more habitual and earnest it is, the more dominion will it give them over us, and the more shall we be

transformed into their likeness. It is very evident too, that this process must make our faith and hope clear and strong, because the grounds and affections on which they stand are thereby kept in perpetual view and bloom.

The Gospel is a system of promises great and precious, whereby believers "become partakers of a divine nature," not that God communicates any thing of his essence to them, but works a resemblance in them to his own perfections. But how is this done? Not as a picture is made to resemble a living being, by the art and brush of the painter. There is a milk, a wine, a nourishing in the promises. They are words of spirit and life, and whoso feeds on them will partake of their purity, and grow to the image of Christ. Hence they are said to be made "clean through the word that He had spoken unto them."

Moreover the promises call the mind to the holiest and most glorious objects. They express or embrace what may be known and enjoyed of God, and *he that hath hope in them*, is not at once made pure, but *purifieth himself, even as God is pure.* He takes not his ease, contented with his possessions; he rests not like a young bird in its nest, having its food brought to it, and gaping only to receive it, but he is hungering and thirsting; he is working because *The grace of God hath appeared teaching him to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.* He has great expectations, and he must needs live in them and to them, *looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* Herein is seen how we gain the bread and water of spiritual life. It is by feeding on Christ through

the promises. It is thus that we come to the *stature of perfect men in Him.* The life that shows itself outwardly and carnally, may be encompassed with infirmity and sorrow, while the new life is gathering fresh strength and consolation from its fountain; cheerfully going forth and bearing the burden and heat of the day, as outwardly we languish and die.

That we are dependent, is a secret of life and strength which we are to *use,* not a weakness in which we may rest and despond. It is an argument for action, a pledge that we shall not act alone, but as co-workers with God, and that what we so do, will be done to some effect. We are never unaided; and if we conceive of any Christian doctrines as discouraging our efforts it is a delusion, a snare either of Satan or of our senses. The world is teeming with the agency of God. History and our own experience are but

records of it. The Spirit by which we are enlightened and sanctified is in us and about us, and pervades with life all the truth He has inspired, so that it is *living truth* indeed. We cannot have a good motion which He will not aid. We cannot strike on any of the paths of the just which He will not illumine. We cannot war with any spiritual foe which He will not help us to vanquish. He is as the radiance of the sun, that from which we cannot fly,—the medium of our sight, that without which, *seeing* we should not see. In our dependence then are the springs and the riches of our power. Ah, would we but rouse ourselves, would we but rise to the "top of our speed," would we engage our mind and affections on heavenly things, and lose ourselves in them, as we sometimes do in the pursuit of worldly riches and knowledge, making our occupation a delight greater than all other

pastimes, we should be wonder-struck at our advancement, our complaining of weakness and want of aid would cease, our yokes become easy and our burdens light, and we be found putting forth the strength of God in arms of flesh.

The assimilating power of love, the elevating power of faith, the sanctifying power of the truth through the Spirit, all point to, and confirm the suggestions I have made on the importance of holding these things ever to the eye of the mind. That we are so worldly; that the persuasion and sweetness of divine realities so little affect us; that afflictions surprise us and make us restive and impatient, is owing to the wandering of our thoughts from these great supports, and to the despondency thus induced. A disinclination is thus acquired to think upon spiritual things; the effort to do so seems unproductive because it is not long sustained,

and thus are we tempted by our own indolence to forego its advantages.

We must suppose that there is great power in the faith of the Gospel; that it may be made to compensate the loss of all things; and when we consider how feeble is its operation in most cases, contrasted with its evident capacity and design, we must conclude the defect is our fault, and comes of not applying our thoughts with due constancy to the object and succours of it. If we have a little faith, or a little love, they will increase if they be not denied the objects on which they live. So is it with every virtue. We receive grace for grace. The good we have becomes the means and pledge of attaining more, as a little fire increases by every thing it catches on till no resistance can stay it, and its heat is felt by all around.

There is certainly power and adaptation in divine truth to work our entire transfor

mation, and as we know *this to be the will of God, even our sanctification*, we are shut up to the conclusion that our slow and uncertain advances indicate the occupation of the mind by thoughts and objects adverse to spiritual life. Where that life is, and congenial objects are cherished and gazed upon with a partial eye, there will be a growth of it, an increase which will overmaster all opposing affections. All the knowledge we have of the economy of our nature shows this must be the result, and all the analogies of our experience confirm it. The growth of this life in its several stages may not be visible. There is in it a hidden range of motive and sensibility as extensive as the field of its hope and observation, in which the roots of life may be striking deep, and its obstructions be clearing away, without any outward manifestation.

It would carry me beyond the limits I

must assign to myself, to discuss this subject further. I have presented these hints upon it with the hope that the reader will dwell upon their evidence, and carry them out to good results. It is not more certainly our duty, than it is our privilege and blessedness, to grow in grace. Things divine expand and impart their virtue to us under our admiring contemplation. He whose mind is richly imbued with them will not be without support in trial. His enjoyments of this world will not be impaired but exalted. He will have a taste in them of what is far better, and his tears will be as seed sown for a harvest of joy.

THE END.

ERRATA.

Page 15, last line, for *upon the dead*, read from the dead.
" 110, last line, for *themselves*, read ourselves.

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